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JOHNNY MILLER.

JOHNNY MILLER'S FIRST INTERVIEW WITH MRS. HOWLET.—Page 19.

JOHNNY MILLER;

OR,

TRUTH AND PERSEVERANCE.

BY

FELIX WEISS,
AUTHOR OF 'THE CROSSING SWEEPER,' ETC.

Frontispiece by E. D. Murray.

GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,
SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERY AND HARRIS,
WEST CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.
E. P. DUTTON & CO., NEW YORK.

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JOHNNY MILLER;

OR,

TRUTH AND PERSEVERANCE.

CHAPTER I.

DYING INJUNCTION—SEARCH FOR EMPLOYMENT—RESULT.

WHATEVER standing the locality called Gresse Street, Rathbone Place, W., may have held in the past, it is difficult now, from outward appearance at least, to conjecture. The houses, it is true, are large, and the doorways surmounted by heavy porticos, which may at one time have been considered elegant, but the ravages of time and the want of repair have now brought them into so dilapidated a condition, that they will hardly hold together, and

they can no longer be considered in any way ornamental. Nor is the street redeemed by its approach. A narrow turning out of Rathbone Place brings the wayfarer abruptly upon it. The stones are overgrown with grass, and the one end, through which there is no thoroughfare, is evidently innocent of any heavier traffic than an occasional costermonger's barrow. And yet, looking up at the four storeys into which the houses are divided, the beholder cannot help conjecturing that at some past period the street must have led somewhere, and the houses been inhabited by well-to-do tenants; now, alas! they wear on their faces an acknowledgment that each floor is let out to a separate lodger — the row of bells on the front indicates as much—and the open doorways show that the staircase is common to all. Patches of paper on the window-panes, evidently intended to keep out the draught, and little boards hanging in the area or from the window sills, with 'Mangling done

here' inscribed upon them, pretty clearly show the position of the inhabitants. Pinching poverty exhibits itself on all sides.

There is no occasion to knock at the door of No. 17, for it is open, and three flights of rickety stairs lead to a landing, with doors on two sides of it. A female, dressed in shabby black, is very quietly entering the front room; and as she opens the door, an anxious look is cast to the other end of the apartment. Her face is very pale and very thin, and looks pinched and careworn. At one time it must have been good-looking, and even now, were it not for the death-like paleness and a nervous twitching about the mouth, it would still be handsome.

Mrs. Miller had had her share of troubles, and but for the little fellow who now lay asleep at the other end of the room, she might have been tempted many a time to end them. She married very young, and had one child, a boy. Her husband was a hard-working mechanic, who managed during

his lifetime not only to give her a comfortable home, but also to make it a happy one. The story of her troubles is simple enough, and common enough too. Her husband died; and, saving the furniture in their little home, and a trifle put away, she was left penniless. Her boy was then about ten years old; but young as he was, the remembrance of his father's last illness was destined never to be erased from his memory. He cannot forget, the day before that parent breathed his last, standing by the bedside in the darkened room.

'Johnny, my boy, listen to me. I shall not be with you long; I am fast drifting to another world, and you will be left with your mother alone. Never forget, my darling, you will be all she will have to look to for comfort on this side the grave. I know you understand me.'

The boy crept nearer to the bedside, and took his father's cold hand in his.

'Listen to her, and try, like a brave little

fellow, to be her protector when I am no longer with her. Remember, darling, and obey her in everything; for I know how true she is to you and has been to me, and how good the lessons are she will endeavour to teach you.'

With the tears running from his eyes, the boy promised all his father asked. His injunction was never forgotten, but rested in his heart, so that if at any time an angry word rose to his lips, he fancied he heard the soft, weak voice's reproval, and the eyes of his dying father looking on him. He knew he was his mother's only comfort, and he felt, in a certain sense, that he was her protector also.

'I wish I were old enough to work for her,' he said to himself. 'She sits up half the night, and her needle appears never to be out of her hand. I know she gives me a great deal more to eat than she takes herself; but soon, very soon, I must try and work for her.'

The boy's conjectures were right. Mrs. Miller was very poor, and had the greatest difficulty to earn sufficient to enable them to live at all; and yet, out of this scanty pittance, she managed to set aside a trifle towards her son's schooling, so that he was able to read and write a little, and stored in his mind the lessons his mother took every opportunity, with simple earnestness, to impress upon him.

Mr. Miller had been dead about two years, when one evening the mother and son sat in their dismal room,—she trying to finish some work upon the completion of which the following day's dinner would depend, and he endeavouring to master some exercises he had set himself to do. She did not notice that the boy's eyes were fixed upon her, and that he saw how anxiously she proceeded with her task.

'Mother, I have something I want particularly to say to you,' he suddenly commenced.

Mrs. Miller took her eyes from her work, and then, for the first time, perceived how intently her son was looking at her.

'We can't go on as we are doing now, mother; the work is never out of your hands. Don't you think I can do something to help you?'

Mrs. Miller smiled. 'Yes, dear, you can thread my needle when I require it. You don't imagine that you can stitch, do you?'

The smile the poor woman gave was a very sickly one, and was not lost upon the sensitive child.

'You don't understand me, mother. I mean, can I not make some money?'

This time the widow allowed the work she was engaged upon to drop from her hands, and a tear started to her eye.

'I have been thinking of this a long time,' the son continued, 'and I want you to consent for me to go and seek my fortune.'

'No, no, dear,' Mrs. Miller cried in alarm,

'you would not leave me? I should die without you.'

'I don't for a moment think of leaving you,' the boy returned. 'Listen, dear mother,' and he crept to her side. 'I have been to school for some time, and can now read and write pretty well. Don't check me—I have set my heart upon going into the world and trying to find something to do. You know I have a school-fellow named Johnny Sanders, and he appears to be very fond of me, and has given me very good advice. I will tell you all when I am successful, and successful I know I shall be. You know you can trust me, for I can find my way about town everywhere.'

What could the poor mother say? She knew that he was right, although she had wished to have been able to keep him at school at least for another year.

'My good boy, do you think that money is to be had by merely asking for it? Who would employ one so young as you?'

But it was vain for her to try and oppose him; his resolution was taken, and the longer he looked at his mother's pale face, the more that resolution became fixed. He made her promise that he might leave home for a few hours in the morning, and when the morning came his heart was more sanguine than ever; and as his mother watched him running down the street until he was out of sight, she felt how much he needed a light heart to face the cold world—seeking his fortune, as he called it—at twelve years of age.

It was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon when Johnny Miller returned. His mother was anxiously looking out for him, and met him at the street door. The moment she looked in his face she felt convinced that he had not been successful, but she kissed him fondly, and made him sit down to dinner.

When he had finished his meal, his disappointment seemed gradually to pass away.

He acknowledged that he had been a long distance, and was very tired; yet he was still undaunted, and begged to be allowed to continue his search on the following day.

'You know, mother, you have always told me not to expect to be successful without perseverance. I must not give in, for young Sanders said to me that generally when we begin to lose heart something good is in store for us. I will tell you all my adventures when I obtain what I want; and I have resolved not to give up until I am successful.'

Poor Mrs. Miller, although her heart was very full, could only kiss her son and let him have his own way. So the following day he was out again, as full of hope as ever; but he returned in the evening tired and sad. And so he did for five days following, until at length his mother endeavoured to dissuade him from continuing what she feared would only prove a fruitless search;

but he still cried, 'Once more, once more; don't let me prove a coward. Something tells me I must not lose heart.'

As the morning sun shone on his bright young face, its sanguine expression communicated some of its hopeful influence even to the poor widow. Again she watched him until out of sight, and as she sat over her work something seemed to cheer her, she knew not what; but the bright upturned face she had kissed this morning seemed to remain ever beside her.

Four o'clock passed, and five, and six; still the boy did not return. In vain Mrs. Miller tried to calm her agitation. From the window she could see so short a distance, that at length, her fears increasing, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and stood at the door. There were few passers-by at the time, but the widow's expression must have been an anxious one, for every one seemed to stare at her so, that at last she determined to go and try if she could meet him. Greatly

to her delight, she had not gone many yards from her door before she espied him running towards home, his hair flying back, and his face bathed in perspiration. The few words he had breath to utter were joyous ones, but his mother was only too glad to get him beside her again to pay much attention to what he had to say. It was not until he had refreshed himself, that, resting his head on his hand, and looking up into his mother's face, his gentle voice all tremulous with emotion, he asked to be allowed to relate his adventures.

'I told you, mother dear, that it was Johnny Sanders who first encouraged me to go and seek my fortune. I had long noticed how hard you had to work, and it distressed me much; so one day I said to him, "Do you think, Johnny, I could earn a shilling or two in any way?"

'He answered me that in London boys are always wanted in a hundred trades; and although he thought me too young to do

JOHNNY SEEKING A SITUATION.

much hard work, yet I might get a situation to begin with as an errand-boy, and earn a shilling or two a week. I was so overjoyed at hearing this that I could not sleep at night, and the more I thought of it the more I watched you, and determined to try what I could do. At last, you know, you gave your consent, and I started, hardly knowing which way to turn. Well, the first day, I called at a great many shops and offices. I felt very shy, but gradually got more courage as I proceeded. Some told me to go about my business; others laughed at me; and one old gentleman, in a very gruff voice, as he dangled his watch seals, said I was too young for a shop-boy or an errand-boy, or indeed, for a matter of that, any boy at all but a school-boy, and that I ought to be ashamed of myself. But I did not feel ashamed of myself, mother, as I thought of you, and the hard trials you have. I tried to keep up my heart, and on the second day called at over thirty places of

business, for I kept a note each day of the streets I had passed through;' and the boy brought out of his pocket a little book, in which he had noted his proceedings.

'My second day was not more fortunate than the first, and I must say I felt very sad, but I still resolved not to give in. I was very tired, so I sat myself down on a stone nearly in front of a beer-shop, and the tears began to fill my eyes, although I tried to keep up—I did, mother. I must have been sitting on the stone some time before I noticed, standing in the doorway of the beer-shop, a stout, goodnatured-looking man. He was smoking a long pipe, and, as I fancied, watching me; but his face looked so pleasant that I got up and spoke to him, telling him what I wanted, and who I was.

'"Some place as an errand-boy!" he said, and his words and the smoke came all out of his mouth together. "Why! you are but a child."

'"But I don't want much," I said. For I thought, mother, however trifling the sum I could earn at first, I might get more afterwards. "If you would take me, sir, I am sure I would do all I can to serve you."

'"Take you, my child?" he said, and I fancied he gave a shiver. "No, no; God forbid that I should take you in here, but I will talk to you. Come in; I may be able to give you some advice."

'I followed him into the beer-shop, and he sat me upon a form, and seated himself at the side of me. He did look a very big man, and I seemed a very little boy by his side; but he was very gentle, so I plucked up courage, and told him all about you. I fancied that he appeared interested in what I had to say; and after a pause, he, patting me on the head, exclaimed, "Why, my boy, if you were to come and live with me for one month, it would be your ruin. Mine is a common beer-shop, and the men and women you would see here, and the words

you would hear, would soon frighten you away."

'I was astonished at all this, but said nothing; and after he had told me a great deal more, he went behind the bar, and brought some bread and cheese, which he put before me. I did not know whether I was to eat it or not, for he took no further notice of me, but went to the shop door, and commenced smoking again.

'At length he returned, and finding I had not touched the bread and cheese, he patted me on the head, saying, "Eat, my boy, eat; I am sure you are welcome. Your innocent face reminds me of one I have parted with for ever." And I fancied, mother, he had a tear in his eye; at least his voice trembled, and his hand too. He went away again for a moment, and returned with a glass full of beer; but checking himself as he was about to place it on the table before me, said: "No, my boy, no; don't touch it. I thought I was attending to a

customer. The less you take of that, as a poor boy, the better; it might be your ruin —it has ruined others," and he brought me a glass of water. I finished my bread and cheese, and as it was getting late, I begged to be allowed to leave. He said he should like to see me again, and to let him know if I were successful, and he put a shilling into my hand. Why, mother, was he so kind to me, and why should he give me a shilling? He did not seem very rich, and I feel sorry that I did not thank him more; but he took me so by surprise, I had nothing to say.

'Well, for five days I went running about from shop to shop, without, as you know, finding any one who would engage me. They all said I was too little, or too young, —some turning away angrily, others kindly telling me that they did not think I should find any one willing to engage such a mite of an errand-boy. This morning, however, I determined to try quite another quarter

of the town; but the day had nearly passed, and I was making my way towards home, when, tired and footsore, I found myself standing before a small draper's shop. I was beginning to lose heart altogether, and could hardly prevent the tears from coming to my eyes. I must have been looking in the shop window some time before I noticed that an old lady, who sat at a high desk, had been watching me. She was such a funny-looking lady, I could not take my eyes from her. She wore an old-fashioned frilled cap, and had round spectacles. Altogether, her face reminded me so strongly of an owl, that I felt I could not take my eyes from her. I noticed that her little round eyes opened and closed behind her spectacles, as if the light was too strong for them; and so greatly did her gaze seem to fascinate me, so fixed was her resemblance to the owl, I could only look in at the window with a stupid, wondering expression.

'At length she got down from her stool, and coming to the door, said, in a quick, shrill voice, "Now, young gentleman, I hope I am not disturbing you, but I think when we meet again you will be able to remember me."

'Feeling, mother, that I was not a young gentleman, I looked very shy, and said as I came to the door, "I am only a poor boy, ma'am, looking out for a situation."

'"Looking *out* for a situation!" she replied, in a quicker and shriller voice than ever; "and is that any reason why you should try to gaze people out of all countenance? Go away with you, and don't let me catch you looking *out* for a situation at my window again!"

'Her look had become so maliciously owlish, and her cap border stood up so stiff all round her face, I became really frightened of her, and said in a low, timid voice: "I am very, very sorry, ma'am, but I do wish I could get some one to give me a trial. No

one will, and I have walked all over London for six days, and can get nothing to do. Every one seems to look at me in doubt—no one will give me any encouragement, because they say I am so young."

'I was turning away with tears in my eyes, when the old lady suddenly seized me by the collar, and dragging me into the shop, pounced me upon a roll of flannel. "Now," she said, in the softest and most pleasant voice imaginable, "tell me who are you, and what do you want?"

'I was so taken by surprise that I believe I should have been too frightened to answer her at all, were it not that her voice had so suddenly changed, and the face she turned upon me had a look of the tenderest encouragement. The old resemblance to the owl was still there, but it was no longer that of the malicious owl it had been a few moments before. I at once, mother, gave her an account of all our troubles, and told her how eager I was to try and

relieve you by earning a trifle as an errand-boy.

'Without answering me, she mounted her high stool, and, perched there, ran her eye down a long list hanging at the side of her desk.

'"Campbell might do," she said; "but no, he is not strong enough for that. At Tomlins' he would never have done, and Brewster would send him home at midnight. No, no;" and with her two fingers she thrust her round glasses more firmly into her eyes. "I have it," at length she cried; "HOWLET will try him; HOWLET will see what *it* can do." She then bounced down from her high stool,—I seated on the roll of flannel all the time,—and standing before me with her face turned down upon mine, and her head very much on one side, she resembled more than ever a large bird as she said, "How would you like Howlet's, at two shillings a week? Speak out, boy! don't be afraid."

'Not feeling particularly confident what

Howlet's was, but understanding thoroughly the two shillings a week, I cried out, jumping from the roll of flannel, "Oh, yes; let me have Howlet's at two shillings a week. I am sure I would be very grateful, and would try to be active and do everything they wanted. Oh, do let me have it!"

'I was so much in earnest that I boldly took the old lady by the sleeve of her gown; but the moment after, ashamed at my rashness, hung down my head. For some minutes she stood with her small round eyes fixed upon me; at length, again taking me by the collar of my jacket, she led me to the other end of the shop, and giving me a piece of paper and a pencil, told me to write while she attended to some customers who at that moment came in. I am able, you know, mother, to write a little; and although my hand may be rather a large one, yet it is very distinct. At first I did not know what to write about, until, thinking of the headings of the copy-slips we used at

school, I began, "*Depend more on your own exertions than fortune;*" "*A good word costs nothing;*" "*Do a thing rather than wish it done.*"

'I was still writing, when, turning round, I found the old lady looking over my shoulder. She patted me on the head, and said, "That will do. Can you tell me twelve times six?" I answered correctly. "Good. Go through your pence table." I at once complied. "Very good, very good; Howlet is satisfied, you shall have *it* at three shillings a week." All this time she continued to open and close her eyes, thrusting on her spectacles with two fingers of one hand, until I fully expected she would end by closing them up altogether.

'I now timidly inquired whether Howlet's was far off, and wished to know when I should go there.

'"Lord bless the boy!" she said, waving her right hand majestically, and looking down upon me with the owlish expression

stronger than ever; "this is Howlet's — Howlet's since 1710, and I am its representative."

'I now for the first time became aware that the old lady was engaging me for her own establishment, and felt deeply grateful for the interest she appeared to take in me. So, mother, ends the first part of my adventures, and it will not be my fault if their continuation is not equally as successful.'

The mother's joy at the satisfactory conclusion of her boy's search for employment may be readily imagined; indeed, during his narrative, she had frequently interrupted him with expressions of the deepest sympathy and affection. They talked long and earnestly together, and devised so many plans for the future, that it was near midnight before they thought of going to rest.

CHAPTER II.

THE 'SILVER LAMB'—THE TRAP.

HAD the morning that followed the errand-boy's narrative of his adventures in search of a situation been wet and gloomy, both mother and son would have felt its saddening influence. They were up early, and the bright sun welcomed them. It was the first thoroughly joyous meeting they had had for some time, and Mrs. Miller did not forget to pour into her son's ear, as he finished dressing himself, all kinds of moral precepts, and tender words of advice as to his conduct in his new situation.

He resolved that Johnny he was to be called no longer, but plain John. He was to be regarded no more as a child; but,

starting as he did into the world with the bold resolve, as he expressed it, 'to conquer or to die,' it would never do to allow a trace of his childhood to remain.

'I go,' he said, his cheek flushing up and his hand trembling, 'with the full confidence that I shall succeed. And only think, mother—three shillings a week to commence with! It's not bad, is it? Three shillings to commence upon, then it may be six, and perhaps eight or ten—perhaps at last even a pound a week!'

'Johnny, Johnny,' cried his mother, 'do not be too sanguine; wait until at least a year has passed—'

'Don't call me Johnny, mother dear. Not that I am proud, but in business, you know, Johnny would never do.' At length—being thoroughly examined from top to toe, and his clothes so carefully brushed that not a speck of dirt was to be seen, although they were nearly threadbare—he started; and as it is a good quarter of an hour's walk from

his home to 'Howlet's,' we will take the liberty of arriving there before him.

When Claudius Howlet died, he left a fortune of about twenty thousand pounds, to be divided in equal parts between two bachelor brothers and a maiden sister; the whole of which sum, it was reported, had been earned in his shop, named the 'Silver Lamb.' Now the 'Silver Lamb' was as tiny a little cabin as any small tradesman might desire. It had a frontage measuring hardly more than twelve feet, door included. Leading from the front shop was a back office, and from the back office a back parlour; and in the rear of the back parlour was a small bedroom, approached by a narrow passage—indeed, so narrow, that had Claudius Howlet not been a very spare man, his two sides would have polished the walls.

He kept a housekeeper, who had her own apartments somewhere underneath, but how approached, and how lighted, the oldest inhabitant in the district could never decide;

it was a secret known only to herself and her master. Certain it is, that the customer who visited the shop, the trader who was asked into the office, or the friend whom Howlet entertained in the parlour, had none of them seen either stairs, opening, or outlet; and Claudius always blinked the inquiry by simply remarking, 'Mrs. Kelsey has her own private apartments, and keeps herself to herself, sir;' which remark being intended as a closer, no one dared to broach the subject further, except upon one dread occasion, when Brooks, an audacious errand-boy, was overheard to say to a customer that it was as good as a play to see old Mother Kelsey come up the trap; which Howlet overhearing, impaled him on the spot with his umbrella, paid him his week's wages, and declared, turning him from the door, that if ever he saw him in the street again, Binks, the private watchman, should take him in charge.

Yet from business done at the 'Silver

Lamb,' Claudius Howlet saved, and left to his surviving brothers and his sister, nearly twenty thousand pounds, besides a good name and the respect of both rich and poor in the neighbourhood. The brothers Howlet were not contented to remain long at the 'Silver Lamb.' They took extensive premises in the city, would have closed the little shop in Bloomsbury, and forgotten their origin altogether, had it not been for their sister. She revered the memory of her brother, and having always led an active life, determined upon managing the business herself. There, enshrined in the little shop, with back office, back parlour, and bedroom, the name of Howlet became her greatest boast; and month by month following in her brother's footsteps, seated at the desk that had been his, she more resembled him every day, so that the neighbours began to forget that Claudius was dead, and called her simply 'Howlet,' as they had called her brother. Indeed, wear-

ing the round spectacles that he had worn, and keeping up the old expression, voice, and manner, with the wonderful resemblance to the owl, had caused a speculation whether the name had created the expression, or the expression the name. Thus 'Howlet' lived and prospered as in its early days.

St. Giles' had just chimed eight as young Miller came up to the door, and the old lady, pointing to the dial, received him with a gracious smile, saying, 'Be always in time, John, do everything at its proper time, John, and you will save your time, John.' The shutters were not taken down from the shop windows, but this, Mrs. Howlet said, was Towler's duty; and as she was speaking, a tall, large-boned young man made his appearance, who, without saying a word to any one, or seeming at all surprised at seeing young Miller, flew at the bolts, drew them out, then flew at the shutters, and pulling them down, carried three at a time through the shop, and indeed made all ready

for business before the new-comer had an opportunity of offering his services.

Mrs. Howlet had a very high opinion of Towler, partly because Towler's eldest brother had been errand-boy in the establishment years ago. But Towler, she remarked, was in some things rather too fast; and as young Miller watched him throwing one thing here and another there, he could not help thinking (boy though he was) that the same might have been done without quite so much noise or bustle.

The new errand-boy entered upon his duties with even more ability than his mistress had any reason to expect from his tender years. He had not been six hours in her employ before her ever-watchful eyes discovered his perfect willingness to do all he was told, and she also noticed the excellent home training he had received. At first, Towler took but little notice of him, continuing his everyday work without so much as giving him a word. In vain the

new-comer endeavoured to be of use to his companion; but he never received one syllable of thanks, until at length Mrs. Howlet, perceiving his ill-disguised contempt for all poor Miller's services, called him seriously to account, telling him, in her own concise manner, that with all his quickness and experience the child knew much he had yet to learn, and he might study from him one thing,—ever to be civil and obliging. Towler's manner would then as suddenly change—he would even go so far as to see Miller part of the way home, introducing him by the way to many of his associates, and upon more than one occasion trying to induce him to enter a public-house, named the 'Hand and Heart,' that he might partake of spirit and water, purchased, as he said, specially to entertain him.

But the errand-boy continued to make a confidante of his mother, and they had long conversations together of all that transpired during the day. Thanks to her good advice,

his weeks passed on without a sorrow, and his little money (for he now received five shillings a week) added so considerably to the mother's store, that they seemed to possess all they could possibly desire. And so passed tranquilly and uneventfully the first six months of his employment at the 'Silver Lamb.'

He did not forget to call upon the kind-hearted man at the beer-shop who had given him a shilling, and to tell him of his good fortune; indeed, he wanted to return the money, but Dobley (for that was his name) would not accept it.

'Persevere, my man,' he said to him at parting, 'and avoid bad companions. You had better tell your mother everything; and above all,'—there his voice trembled,—'never be prevailed upon to go out on the drink. I had a son once—but no matter; one of these days I may tell you *his* history,' and he turned away to hide his emotion.

Young Miller could not feel altogether

comfortable, now that his fellow-assistant had changed so suddenly. He doubted, with all his attentions and all his fine words, whether he really was his friend. He observed that by following Towler's advice he generally got into more trouble than when he used his own judgment. He fancied—though his experience was small, and he was too kindly disposed to think ill of any one without a cause—that Towler appeared anything but sorry when the mistakes he made displeased Mrs. Howlet. He detected him, upon more than one occasion, putting the blame on to his shoulders for errors he had had nothing to do with. But at length an event occurred which not only convinced him of Towler's duplicity, but changed the whole course of his conduct towards him. Up to this moment he had been a poor, simple boy, distinguished only by his affection for his mother, his desire to get on in life, and his love of truth. From this moment he appeared suddenly to look upon

everything in a changed light; he seemed alive to the fact that others might not be as truthful as himself—that he had enemies to encounter, and possibly bad impressions to live down.

A well-known customer of the 'Silver Lamb' called and gave an order, which was to be executed on the following day; and as the goods were very light, it was suggested that young Miller should take the parcel home. Towler looked them up, Mrs. Howlet ticked off the invoice, and the following morning the errand-boy was despatched with them to Mecklenburgh Square. He had just passed through Lamb's, Conduit Street, and was crossing opposite the Foundling Hospital, when he was accosted by a boy a few years older than himself.

'Now, then, Miller, don't hurry yourself—take your time; but they are waiting in Mecklenburgh Square for the parcel, and unless you mend your pace I would not be in your shoes for a trifle.'

'How do you know my name is Miller?' the errand-boy asked; 'and how do you know I am going to Mecklenburgh Square?'

'How do I know it?' the boy replied; 'because I was sent to Mrs. Howlet's shop by my master, and they told me Miller had been sent with the parcel, and that I should overtake him if I walked fast.'

'Who told you at Mrs. Howlet's?' he asked.

'Mr. Towler, the shopman, did. So hand it over, you stupid, or I shall get myself into disgrace wasting my time talking to you,' and without further parley he took hold of the parcel.

The errand-boy could have no suspicion but that the messenger had been sent after him; still he asked one more question before giving up the goods.

'I have never seen you before; how did you know me?'

'Oh, they took good care to describe you, and said you were carrying a large parcel

done up in brown paper, and addressed to 50 Mecklenburgh Square.'

This answer removed the slightest suspicion that might have lingered in young Miller's mind, and he gave up the parcel at once. He, however, waited for a moment, and saw the boy who had accosted him pass into Mecklenburgh Square. He then hurried back to the 'Silver Lamb.' When he got there, Towler was at dinner and Mrs. Howlet attending to a customer; so the matter passed from his mind, and it was not until they closed shop in the evening he had an opportunity of mentioning the subject to his fellow-assistant. Towler, however, seemed to avoid him, and took but little notice of Miller's questioning.

The errand-boy went home that evening, for the first time, full of thought and anxiety. He, however, had one good friend and counsellor, — his mother, — and to her related what had transpired on his morning's errand.

'You see, mother,' he said in conclusion, 'he called me by my name, knew where I was going, and went so far as to say that Towler sent him; but when I asked Towler this evening, he declared he knew nothing about it.'

A cloud seemed to spread itself before the mother's mind. Her son's fellow-assistant had always appeared to her a careless, selfish town-boy, whose life had been passed more in the streets than anywhere else; still she had no reason to believe that he would do anything dishonest, or join in any conspiracy to injure her son. She felt, from the little she had heard of Master Towler, that he was already jealous of the favour his mistress showed towards her son, and that he would, had he the opportunity, try and prejudice Mrs. Howlet against him; but she dismissed from her mind the idea that his self-interest would lead him to do more than utter an occasional ill-natured word. It was, however, agreed between the

JOHNNY TROUBLED.

mother and son, that on the following morning Mrs. Howlet should be made acquainted with all that had transpired. They went to bed, endeavouring to dismiss from their minds the unpleasant thoughts their conversation had occasioned; and when young Miller arose on the following morning, he was himself again, although he felt a little nervous, having over-slept himself, and being some minutes later than usual. When he arrived at the 'Silver Lamb,' he found the shutters were down, the shop open, Towler in his place, and Mrs. Howlet perched on her high stool, with the owl expression strongly stamped on her countenance. All this rather surprised him, for he generally got to business before Towler, and his mistress rarely made her appearance until an hour afterwards; but he bounded in with a light step, and saying 'good morning' to his fellow-assistant, commenced to put away some goods which had been taken down. Mrs. Howlet followed him with her sharp

dark eyes, but said not a word; and young Miller, remembering his promise to his mother, was about to tell her what had occurred, when, turning half round on her stool, and thrusting her spectacles more firmly into her eyes, she cried, 'Miller, come this way.'

The youth addressed at once obeyed her summons, although his face flushed up and he felt uneasy, and a nervous presentiment came over him that something was wrong.

'I have had a letter this morning,' the old lady began, 'complaining that the goods I ordered you to deliver yesterday in Mecklenburgh Square have not been received. How is this, Miller?' and she fixed her small, penetrating eyes full on the boy.

'Indeed, ma'am, I am not to blame,' he answered; but before he could say more, she broke in—

'Not to blame? Was not the parcel given you to deliver at Mecklenburgh Square? Did you not take it as I directed?'

'I went with it as far as the Foundling,

when I was stopped by a boy, who told me you had sent him after me, having been here for the parcel. He called me by my name, and said Towler had described me. How could he know my name, and tell where I was going, unless he had been told?'

The old lady's eyes never moved from the boy's face, and her gaze was one not readily met. There was something in it which seemed to say, 'I will not be put off with any made-up excuses; out with the truth, and perhaps I may forgive you, but no falsehood will go down with Howlet.'

Her eye, though busily engaged with Miller, did not lose sight of Towler, and she noticed how eagerly he tried to hear every word she uttered, and how he gradually drew nearer to her desk. 'Towler, keep away; I will investigate this matter without your assistance. Wait; your examination shall come next.' The assistant started, and blurting out some excuse, made for the other end of the shop.

'You see, Miller, this is a very unlikely story. You leave here with a parcel you are directed to take to a particular house, and in less than ten minutes you are met by a boy who you say addressed you by name, knew where you came from, where you were going to, and declared Towler sent him.' This was said in a kindly tone; but suddenly changing, and putting on her severest frown, she cried, coming down from her stool and taking Miller by the collar of his coat, 'What proof can you give me that you are speaking the truth? Towler says—but come here, Towler, and speak for yourself.' This she said in a loud, commanding tone.

Towler came forward, looking anything but comfortable under that searching gaze. He knew it of old, and felt how difficult it was to 'come over the gov'nor.'

'Did any one call here after Miller left?' she interrogated; 'I mean, to ask about the parcel being sent home.'

'No one, ma'am; at least I saw no one.'

'You did not send any one after Miller, giving him your name, and directing him to deliver up the parcel?'

'I did not, ma'am,' Towler answered.

'Believe me, mistress, believe me, whether Towler sent the boy or not, he mentioned your name, and said he was sent by him. I would not speak false—I would not. 'Twas not until the shop was closed Towler told me he knew nothing about it, and I went home to my mother and told her every word, and had resolved to repeat the same to you the moment I came in the morning.'

There was in the boy's face an expression of truth it was difficult for any one to disbelieve; and as the old lady looked in his earnest countenance, and from him to her other assistant, she appeared troubled, and with a puzzled expression said, 'You both remain here. Don't attempt to leave until I give you permission,' and without further explanation, put on her cloak and bonnet, and marched out of the shop.

CHAPTER III.

THE INWARD RESOLVE.

MRS. HOWLET was away for more than an hour, and during her absence young Miller felt strongly tempted to appeal to Towler, but for a suspicion that he was not to be trusted, and that he knew more about the missing parcel than he was willing to acknowledge.

The errand-boy sat at the foot of the desk his mistress had just vacated, and buried his face in his hands.

'You've got yourself into a nice mess,' Towler said after a pause. 'How could you be such a fool as to give up the parcel to the first knave you met?—that is, if you did give it up.'

Miller started to his feet as if he had been shot.

'What is that you say?' he cried out. 'If I did give it up? Do you think for one moment that I stole it? Do you think I would throw away my good name, and become a thief?'

'Well, how should *I* know? Many a one has tried the same game on before you. The parcel was valuable; and I am sure the story you tell is neither such a likely one or so new a one to be believed.'

Miller looked into his fellow-assistant's countenance with a fierce, defiant gaze, his lips quivering, and his whole frame trembling with suppressed rage. But he did not gaze for long; the expression of Towler's face at that moment seemed to reveal the secret of his mind. Miller looked at him defiantly, with a clear, penetrating look, but in a moment a smile curled his lips, and he walked to the other end of the shop with a firm step. In that moment he had made a

discovery, and with it a resolve—an inward resolve, for, young as he was, his resolution was strong. Could Towler as readily have read his companion's countenance, it had been better for him had he quitted the 'Silver Lamb' for ever. He, however, merely congratulated himself upon having silenced the shop-boy, and walked to the door whistling complacently, perfectly satisfied that he had done a good thing, and was not likely to be troubled by young Miller any more.

Mrs. Howlet returned. She walked into the shop as she had walked out, hung up her bonnet and shawl, mounted her desk, and proceeded to cash up some invoices without making a remark.

In vain both her assistants looked into her face; they could read nothing there. Howlet had made a mental memorandum, but she did not advertise it, either by word or a single twinkle in her expressive eyes. The day wore on as usual, the time for

closing arrived, and Miller left the 'Silver Lamb' for the second time anxious and thoughtful. Still his conviction was strong that truth would yet prevail.

His mother, the moment they met, read at a glance that his mind was ill at ease but she took his hand with a merry laugh, saying,—

'I can see, my dear, that you are bothered; but don't mind. Who do you think has been here?'

The errand-boy looked up, and listlessly answered that he did not know.

'Mrs. Howlet!'

'Mrs. Howlet?' Miller cried in astonishment. 'When did she come?'

'Early this morning—indeed, very soon after you left for business; and I told her every word you related to me last night.'

'Did she ask you?'

'Not exactly. She started in quite unexpectedly, and taking a chair, quietly dusted it, then sat down, and first looked

at me, then round the room, then at me again. I was so startled that I could not utter a word, but stood with a basin in my hand, as if spell-bound.

'"Is your name Miller?" she commenced, taking off her spectacles, and, having wiped them, putting them slowly on again.

'I could only answer, "Yes."

'"Don't be afraid," she said; "you did not expect a visit from me, Mrs. Miller? My name is Howlet. I suppose you know me now?"

'I answered that I did, and that I felt greatly indebted to her for all her kindness to you.'

'What did she say then?' the errand-boy asked, deeply interested.

'She inquired whether you had told me that you had got yourself into some trouble. "Speak out, woman," she continued, in a voice so commanding and with a look so searching that I really felt afraid of her. However, I simply related every word of

MRS. MILLER'S VISITOR.

what you told me last night, adding, that I was convinced that you were innocent.

'"To be sure you think him innocent; it is only natural, as his mother, that you should."

'"But, ma'am, you do not think him guilty?" I cried, deeply agitated.

'"Sit down, little woman, sit down," she answered; "I believe every word you have said—but listen to me. Has he any companions who know where he is employed—any one to whom he may have communicated my name or Towler's?"

'I said I was sure you had none, then added that I distrusted Towler; whereupon she started to her feet, saying angrily, "Why distrust Towler? He has been with me many years; *I* do not distrust Towler, and you have no right to distrust him."

'She neither said good-bye, nor led me to believe that she was about to depart, but, starting to her feet, had opened the door and was half-way down the stairs before

I recovered from my surprise. Johnny, my boy, she is a very funny old lady—'

'But a dear good one; and I would sooner chop off my right hand than deceive her in a word.'

And so the matter seemed ended.

Not so with Miller. From that moment he attended even more assiduously to business than ever; indeed, he was never away. Whatever he was asked to do he did willingly, but thoughtfully. To his mistress' commands he paid the most scrupulous attention, but seldom answered her, excepting when absolutely necessary. To Towler he was frank, nay, even kind and friendly; but his eyes appeared to be everywhere. No bale of goods entered the shop but he took note of what it contained; no parcel went out but he knew every item that was in it. He was there the first in the morning; he left the last at night. He had thrown off the boy, and with the inward resolve strong upon him, said to himself, 'Towler has

doubted my honesty; I will try to believe in his, but I can feel no mercy for him if *he* should prove the rogue.'

'Why, Miller, you never take a holiday,' his companion said; 'you know Mrs. Howlet would give you one if you like to ask her.'

'My greatest pleasure is in my business,' he would reply. 'I have a holiday once a week, and it is a very good one too,—the Sunday.'

Towler looked annoyed, and began to reflect whether he was indeed a match for the junior assistant.

And was all this hidden from Mrs. Howlet? No indeed; her quick, sagacious, business eye took it all in, and yet she was greatly puzzled. There was something about Miller she could not understand. That he was attentive to business, and never gave her the slightest cause to find fault, she allowed. He appeared like a man in manner, although but a boy in years; yet there was a strange, doubtful demeanour with him, although he

was always respectful. She tried to show him that she trusted him, and that his conduct was appreciated; still she felt greatly perplexed. And Towler did not forget, when an opportunity occurred, to throw in a word disparagingly, and tried to insinuate his attention to business might arise from the fear of something being discovered in his absence. But Mrs. Howlet never could discover the merest trifle wrong in anything young Miller had to attend to; and although a good sum of money passed through his hands, he was always correct in his accounts to a farthing.

. . . . . .

Four years have passed away; to Miller, years of hard work, valued experience, and steady progress. What he had an opportunity of learning during the day he took good care to study in his leisure at home. He was now able to write with comparative freedom, could calculate the ordinary bills of parcels, and was well acquainted with

the stock, keeping a close watch upon what came in and what went out. His fellow-assistant, Towler, frequently jested him upon his careful scrutiny and watchfulness; but Miller always met him with a smile, and merely answered that it was his duty to know what goods they possessed, or how could he ever be qualified to serve in the shop, or be able to answer a customer's inquiry? To all this Towler could say nothing. He was first hand there, and Miller never for one moment disputed his authority to do what he thought right. But the four years had not passed without some important changes. Miller's wages had been increased to ten shillings a week, and Mrs. Howlet had found profitable employment for his mother, making up various articles sold in the business, so that altogether their position was much improved.

One trouble alone oppressed the errand-boy,—his suspicion of Towler's honesty. He could not detect him in any theft, still he

was convinced that many articles that had been in stock disappeared without being sold. He particularly marked one roll containing sixty-four yards of flannel, from which Towler sold, according to his check-book, eight yards, and yet upon measuring it only fifty remained. Two days after, Towler accounted for the sale of ten yards more; but when the roll was examined by Miller the same evening, only thirty-six remained. These and similar defalcations sadly puzzled and distressed him, for he was convinced Towler took no parcel away. He would not have stooped to play the spy had he not been doubted; and his resolve was fixed. But he said nothing, his measurement of the goods being always conducted when his fellow-assistant was out of the way; and he never breathed a word to any one except his mother that such defalcations existed,—she believing, however, that her son's over-anxiety frequently led him into error. Mrs. Howlet's book-keeping was anything but

perfect—of that Mrs. Miller had proof—and she fancied that many sales were made by the old lady without any account being kept of them, for her confidence in both her assistants was firm, and not easily shaken. Young Miller could not agree with his mother; he noted every yard of stuff that left the shop, and all that came into it. Although he was sometimes away, he managed to find out what business had been done in his absence, and the accounts did not agree. The more he watched and calculated, the more puzzled he became, and the more convinced that something was wrong.

Although Mrs. Howlet said but little about it, she could not fail to notice his anxiety, and it gratified her to put confidence in him. The loss of the parcel was forgotten; and while she still retained Towler in his post as principal assistant, she, at the same time, let Miller plainly see that she entrusted to him many transactions requiring judgment and the strictest integrity.

CHAPTER IV.

A POWERFUL TEMPTATION.

IT was a fine, clear morning in April. A large order had come into the 'Silver Lamb,' and Towler was very busy making it up. Mrs. Howlet, not wishing to interrupt him, said to Miller,—

'Take this cheque to the bank, and mind you be careful. It is for ten pounds. Bring me five pounds in gold and five in silver.'

Although Miller had upon two or three occasions been to the bank to pay in money, he had never before been entrusted with a cheque to cash. After asking a few questions, he started off in high glee, his susceptible nature alive to the confidence being reposed in him.

The branch bank was a rambling series of offices, which had been added from time to time as the increase of business required greater accommodation. It had double doors and double windows, to keep out all sounds and draughts. The atmosphere was warm, and the kamptulicon soft to walk upon. The long row of desks, the large clock, the extensive counter, the sound of money—indeed, the very air that circulated about the place, seemed calculated to impress a boy who had never been there before with awe; nor was the impression lessened by the appearance of the cashiers and clerks who stood around. How coolly they handled cheques for fabulous sums! how contemptuously they shovelled the gold across the counter! It is true they did sometimes pause to curl their moustache with one hand while examining a note or draft, and at the same time glanced languidly at the presenter. The impression made upon Miller was that all the clerks, and more particularly the cashiers, were thoroughly

'used up.' Their looks, their movements, indeed their very tone of voice was languid. There did not appear to be one bustling man of business among the lot of them, and the errand-boy came to the conclusion it must be their avocation—handling so much cash—that produced this subdued, worn-out tone.

He presented his cheque timidly, after waiting a long time, and looking at one of the clerks, who, although apparently doing nothing, could not sufficiently rouse himself to be aware of poor young Miller's presence. Three times he stretched his hand across the counter. At length, 'How will you have it?' the languid voice inquired; but the 'How will you have it?' was but one word, and very difficult to understand, although repeated.

'Five pounds in silver and the rest in gold, if you please;' and the money was paid over.

Miller put it into a small leather bag given to him by Mrs. Howlet for that pur-

pose, and was about to leave the office when he saw something shining in one corner, and upon stooping down to examine, perceived that it was half-a-sovereign. It was some distance from the counter, near the hinge of the door, and when the door was partly open quite hidden. Miller's first feeling was one of delight at the discovery. He had found it—it was his; but in a moment he remembered where he was. This half-sovereign was not in the street; it was in the bank, and therefore must belong to the bank. 'I must not take it; I have no right to it,' he said to himself; so he at once picked it up, and returning to the counter, said, 'Please, sir, I found this half-sovereign near the door.'

Now at that moment it so happened the languid clerk was counting over rather a large parcel of silver, and in no mood to be interrupted; so he merely waved his hand, and young Miller stood for some moments, undecided what to do. At length, however,

the cashier having completed his money counting, Miller again handed him the half-sovereign. But this time he was not even noticed, the clerk walking to the other end of the counter.

It was a trying moment. The errand-boy was excited by his discovery, and felt greatly annoyed that his honesty did not receive more attention. He had found the money—he had not stolen it; and when he wished to return it he was not even noticed, therefore he might certainly call it his. All this passed through his mind in a moment. Still a small voice whispered, 'Do not take it, do not take it; it will do you no good;' and, throwing his head back, he looked once more to see if there was any one he could address—any one he could give the money to.

At that moment there passed at the back of the counter an old gentleman—at least his hair was quite white, and his back slightly bent; but his eyebrows were black, and his

eyes brilliant, and the face was younger when looked into than it appeared at a first glance. Miller at once appealed to him.

'Oh! please, sir, I've found this half-sovereign.'

Now the words were simple enough, and the manner in which they were said quiet and respectful, but the boy's face showed that he was excited; so the gentleman addressed stood still, and looked at him with a penetrating but kindly gaze. 'You have found half-a-sovereign?' at length he said. 'Where?'

Miller showed the spot, and handed him the money. He stood for a moment without making any remark, although his eyes were busy all the time.

'Walk this way, my boy,' he said. 'Walk in here,' and he conducted him into a snug little office, with 'Private' written on the door.

'Now, my boy,' he continued, seating himself in an easy chair before a formidable

desk, with an inkstand on it so large, Miller conjectured that the writing done there must be something enormous.

'Now answer me, without fear, the questions I am going to put to you. Where do you come from?'

'From Mrs. Howlet's, —— Street, Bloomsbury.'

'Did you come to pay in money?'

'No, sir; I came to cash a cheque.'

'To cash a cheque? For what amount?'

'Ten pounds; and I was—'

'Stop, stop!' the manager interrupted—for it was the branch manager himself who interrogated him—'not so fast. You brought a cheque for ten pounds, and it was paid to you? How was it paid?—in gold?'

'Five pounds in silver, and the rest in gold.'

'Show me—of course you have the money with you?'

'Yes, sir. I was just leaving the bank, and rather in a hurry, for I was told not to

waste any time,' Miller replied, pulling out his leather bag and emptying the contents at the side of the desk.

The manager looked the money over. 'You have five sovereigns here, and five pounds in silver. Have you no other money about you?'

'None, sir.'

'You had no half-sovereign?'

'No, sir.'

'Good, my boy; you have done well to return this. You are an honest little fellow. Now tell me, what is your name?'

Miller told his name, his mother's also, where he lived, and how long he had been at Mrs. Howlet's; and his answers were put down in a book, which he was asked to sign. The manager then took a slip of paper and wrote on it, 'Ask for Mr. George Savell, —— Bank, and call on Wednesday, April 25th.' This he handed to Miller, directing him to be at the bank on the morning of the day written on the paper; and in less

than five minutes the errand-boy was back at the 'Silver Lamb,' explaining to Mrs. Howlet why he had been delayed so long, at the same time handing to her the paper given to him.

The good old lady watched for Miller's return with anything but a pleased expression on her face, but as the boy, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eye, proceeded to detail his adventure, her mouth curled up and her eyes sparkled also. Thrusting her spectacles more firmly on her nose, she looked in his face—and the look was one he valued more than twenty half-sovereigns —and said, in a voice slightly tremulous, and with just the smallest glisten of a tear in her eye, 'Miller, you have done well. Be always honest, be always truthful. Savell can be a good friend to you. Go on the day he has appointed, and we shall see you yet something better than an errand-boy, or I am much mistaken.'

Miller had few words to answer as the old

lady took his hand in hers, but he was rewarded. The touch of that old withered hand seemed to vibrate to his heart. 'I will, I will,' was all he could articulate; and before he had time to say more, even had he been able to do so, Mrs. Howlet was back at her desk again, with the same old owlish look upon her face, and whatever impression the interview had made upon her was known but to herself.

During the morning, Towler had been so much engaged with the work set for him to do, he had not much time to take notice of Miller, or Mrs. Howlet's kindness would have rankled in his breast. Indeed, the self-satisfied assistant was more than usually pleased with himself at this period. Mrs. Howlet seemed to trust him more than ever, and had given him a very large stock of goods to tick off, putting down in a book their quantity, quality, and price, and fixing on them small tickets, as a guide to the seller.

It was the evening of the same day Miller

found the half-sovereign, and the fact of his returning it to the bank had impressed Towler as being 'jolly green;' and he did not forget to tell him so, with sundry jokes about his simplicity, all of which Miller had taken in good part. The shutters were up, and they were getting ready to depart, when Mrs. Howlet suddenly remembered that a parcel had to be delivered at Islington. So, telling Towler to take it at once, she directed Miller to see that all the goods were put in their places again, so that his fellow-assistant might leave without any delay. The shop was in more confusion than usual; but Towler, always eager to get away, — and more particularly when he had any distance to go, for which he was paid omnibus fare,— started off, gaily crying to Miller, 'I wish you joy of your clearance, old fellow,' and the errand-boy was left alone. It did not take him long to set the place to rights, and last of all he came to the goods Towler had been ticketing. The first thing he took was

a roll of flannel, and as the ticket was hanging in front, he saw that it was marked twenty-six yards.

'This can hardly be right,' he said to himself, for his practised eye at once told him the roll contained more than twenty-six yards, and he proceeded to measure it. The quantity proved to be fully thirty-six yards. He examined other portions of the stock, and in nearly every instance the quantity was larger than the ticket affixed represented it to be.

Miller (with his old suspicions of Towler's dishonesty aroused, and with the resolve he had made to himself strong upon him) felt that he could not keep his good mistress longer in the dark; but how much better pleased had he been could she have discovered these frauds herself! The rolls of calico, flannel, and linen lay on all sides around him; and as he stood reflecting what course he should pursue, a gentle hand was placed upon his shoulder, and the

familiar voice of his mistress sounded in his ear.

'Miller, what are you about?' she said; 'you start, and seem to fear me. You are trying to hide something from me; I can see it in your face.'

The truth is, Mrs. Howlet had for some moments been watching her assistant, and could hardly understand why, at this late hour, he should be engaged in measuring goods.

'I thought,' she added, 'Towler had looked to all these flannels, and ticketed them too?'

'He has.'

'And are they not right?'

Miller looked into the old face, but did not answer.

'If you know anything of interest to me or my business, you are bound to answer; I command you to do so.' The owl expression was strongly marked on the face this time—the old expression that had frightened

him when he looked in at the window four years ago.

He felt how much he had to thank his mistress for in the past, and in the present also, and yet he hesitated. His suspicion of Towler's dishonesty appeared to be confirmed; and yet how gladly would he have left to others the task he had set himself,—to unmask the man who had suspected him, and in the outset of his career endeavoured to prejudice him in his mistress' eyes. He took up one of the tickets, and said, 'This roll of flannel contains more than twenty-six yards.'

'Well, I suppose Towler has made a mistake. Why should he ticket it less than it contains?' she answered sharply.

'This piece of calico is marked twenty yards under the quantity.'

'Well, well, Towler is very careless, and he must be spoken to.'

'Good, kind mistress,' Miller continued with emotion, 'don't think for one moment

that I would accuse Towler hastily; but this is not the first time I have found the goods wrongly marked. I have waited, in the hope that I might have been mistaken; but I am convinced — I am convinced Towler is robbing you.'

The old lady dropped into a chair beside which she was standing, and her face for a moment turned very pale. Towler, whom she had trusted, whose brother had been in her employ years ago, robbing her?—impossible! She had befriended the whole family, and set his brother up in business. Towler robbing her? It could not be, for if *he* had robbed her, perhaps they all had robbed her. No; she could not be so deceived—she would not believe it—it was only her errand-boy's mistake.

'Miller,' at length she said, in a calm, decided tone, 'I know that you are grateful, I know that you are doing all you can to prove yourself a faithful servant, but you are prejudiced against Towler, and you would

set down as dishonesty that which is only carelessness.'

'I hope, mistress, it may be so,' Miller replied; 'but allow those numbers to remain on the tickets for a few days. If I am wrong in my suspicions, time will prove; if I am right, you should know that you are deceived.'

'Let it be so, Miller; but I would sooner give one-half of my stock than learn that I have befriended and fostered a thief.'

Miller said no more. After bidding his mistress 'Good night,' he went home, thoughtful and sad, for his was not the disposition to glory in the downfall of any one, however wrongly they may have acted.

When he had left, Mrs. Howlet walked up and down the shop, more agitated than she allowed her assistant to discover. Under that apparently harsh and at times angry demeanour, there lurked a kindly, befriending spirit. For her own comfort she might have given up the 'Silver Lamb' long ago;

but apart from her pride in continuing a business associated with the family for so many years, apart from her love for an active life, she had a long list of useless pensioners, whom she tried to make believe that their lives were most useful ones. She had three old superannuated porters, who regularly called every morning and evening, to ask their mistress' commands, but who had long since ceased to do more than receive their wages.

The private watchman had not seen the outside of the 'Silver Lamb,' excepting in the bright sunshine, for at least ten years. Yet all the three porters and the watchman felt convinced the establishment would be closed in a week were it not for their watchfulness and protecting care.

She took Towler into her employ, not that she particularly liked him, but simply because his brother had served an apprenticeship with the house; and so much did she respect the memory of the elder Howlet,

her brother, that even his very weaknesses were copied and applauded by her.

'If Towler has been robbing me!' continued to vibrate through her whole system, until, weary and heart-sick, she went to rest.

CHAPTER V.

CAUGHT IN THE NET.

LONG before Miller or his fellow-assistant made their appearance the next morning, Mrs. Howlet was up and about. She had carefully examined that portion of the stock which Towler had been measuring and re-marking the night before, and she found, as Miller had stated, in nearly every instance there was a larger quantity than credit was given for on the ticket. The old lady had determined the course she would take; but she had full command over her features, and nothing, either in her manner or what she said, betrayed her determination.

The morning was a cold and gloomy one,

and the more Miller endeavoured to resist its influence, the more depressed he felt. Mrs. Howlet was also anxious and watchful, and had a presentiment that an important era in her life would be determined before the termination of the day. Mrs. Howlet's life was the life of the 'Silver Lamb.' With Miller it was very different. Although his whole mind was in his business, his great desire now was to prove his trustworthiness, and to wipe out the early suspicion cast upon his character. The resolve he had made was still as fixed as ever, and nothing in his fellow-assistant's manner had led him to waver in his resolution.

It is strange that Towler should have no presentiment of evil, no foreboding of the sure reckoning in store for him. He was as careless and apparently as happy as usual. The truth is, he had a great opinion of his own cleverness, and that cleverness had hitherto been wonderfully successful. He was too vain and headstrong to see that

that success had been owing more to the indulgence of his mistress than from any ability of his own. Miller's entry into the business had at first sadly thwarted his plans; but the poor little errand-boy was too great a 'milksop,' in his opinion, ever to interfere with '*his* little game.'

Towler had some time ago enrolled himself as a member of a mysterious society called 'Sons of Freedom,' who met at a little out-of-the-way public-house in a very dirty neighbourhood. To this society or club he had contributed regularly; and he was received there with very great favour, being regarded as one of its chief supporters. He flattered himself that, by drinking large quantities of beer, and consuming much tobacco, he had made himself a valuable member and a favourite—that his associates listened to his oratory with pleasure, and would be only too glad to render him a service had they the power to do so. He knew that each member had made himself

well acquainted with his neighbour's business, and he believed they were bound to protect one another if at any time called upon. The fact of their being men who had either lost their characters, or who never had a character to lose, did not seem to weigh much with him. He believed that they were all-powerful, and he believed also that he was a great chief among them.

But to return. The morning wore on, and Miller was not long in discovering that his mistress was more than usually watchful; but he would not have noticed that had it not been for their conversation of the night before.

St. Giles' clock chimed twelve. 'Now, then, Miller, are you not going to dinner?' Towler asked.

'No,' the errand-boy replied; 'I am going to ask to leave a little earlier, and therefore won't take my dinner-hour.'

'Why, you *are* a stupid,' Towler said. 'I am sure you don't have so many holidays

that you need deprive yourself of your dinner-time. I'll answer for it, the gov'nor won't refuse you.'

There was something in Towler's manner that made Miller fancy he wanted him out of the way, so his determination was fixed that he would not leave.

'No, thank you, Towler,' he said; 'I have set myself a task at the other end of the shop, and if you can manage to attend to any customers who may come in, I would sooner finish my work.'

'Very well, just as you like. I suppose you are going to the play, and like to keep your appetite for a blow-out of oranges and ginger-beer when you get there?'

This conversation was not heard by Mrs. Howlet, but as Miller passed to the other end of the shop, she said, 'Are you not going to dinner?'

'No, thank you, ma'am, I would rather not.'

'Very well, very well,' she answered, giving him a look he fully understood.

Towler, after gazing through the window for some minutes, returned to the back of the counter, and at that moment a woman entered.

She was an ordinary-looking woman enough, and wore a dark dress and shawl; but her face was well known to Miller—he had frequently seen her before. Towler had served her; and although he answered as a perfect stranger, she was well known to him—Miller was convinced of that.

She came for flannel, and Towler took down the roll he had marked the day before. She wanted calico; the piece of calico was handed for her to examine.

Miller was all watchfulness, but did not move from his place. He felt the drops of perspiration stand on his forehead, but did not say a word. He took a strip of paper, and wrote on it, 'Look well at the woman now being served;' then, walking up to his mistress' desk, said in a voice loud enough to be heard by Towler, 'Would you lend me

a knife to point my pencil? I have not got mine with me.'

Mrs. Howlet, without looking at him, passed over the knife, and as he took it he pressed her hand, leaving in it the lines he had written. The pressure of the errand-boy's hand on hers at first startled and surprised her; but seeing the paper, she was herself again in a moment, and putting it on the book she was examining, read: 'Look well at the woman now being served.' She glided the paper again into the palm of her hand, and went on with her work as if nothing had occurred. Presently, leaving her desk, she walked quietly through the shop to the front door, and looked out for some moments. At length, the customer being about to leave, she turned round and met her face to face, at the same time thanking her in the most agreeable voice imaginable, then quietly went to her desk again.

Towler now came bustling up, and gave in his book.

'I'm now going to dinner, ma'am,' he said, 'unless you want me.'

'No, Towler, no; you can go.'

His departure was the signal for Miller to leave his place at the back of the shop, and Mrs. Howlet to quit her desk.

'Why did you ask me to look well at that woman?' she said.

'Because she has been here often before.'

'And what of that, if she is a customer?' Mrs. Howlet replied.

'I have noticed that after her visits many things have been missing, and have fancied that Towler has entered in his book a less quantity than he has served her with. You saw the goods she asked for. What number of yards has Towler put down in his book?'

'Four of flannel and six of calico; also six yards of shirt flannel.'

'The quantity he gave out was more than double that; I have watched him closely,' Miller said. 'May I measure the rolls?'

Mrs. Howlet returned no immediate answer,

but walked to the end of the counter, deep in thought.

'Measure the flannel, and the calico also,' at length she said.

The flannel was measured, and the roll contained only twenty-two yards, showing that fourteen had been cut off instead of four, as marked in the check-book. The calico was also deficient eight yards, fourteen having been taken and only six allowed for. The shirt flannel had also been reduced ten yards instead of six.

'Miller, Miller, you are right. Towler has been robbing me; and this is the return for all the good I have tried to do him. It is not the value of the goods he has stolen I care for; it is not the money, but his ingratitude, that cuts me up. Who can I trust now, when the child I may say born for my service robs me, and I never find it out? Do not speak to me, Miller; go away. I will trust no one any more. I am old and blind, and unfit for business. Leave me—leave me.'

Miller stood looking at the old lady in wonder, for although he felt how deeply she had been wronged, he regarded with some astonishment her grief, for he could not understand her taking so much to heart the petty thefts of a shop-boy. He could not yet understand, that what the old lady prided herself most upon was her insight into character, her perfect knowledge of her business, and the impossibility for any one to deceive *her*. Towler's frauds would have been discovered long ago, if she had only relied less upon her knowledge of character and more upon her quiet observation. She had been served from first to last by about twenty servants, and congratulated herself upon never having been robbed by any of them. Towler's dishonesty lowered her in her own estimation. She felt that she had been duped, and for the moment she was no longer herself. She went to her old seat at the desk, but even her step had lost its firm tread; and muttering, 'I've been

deceived, I've been deceived,' over and over again, remained deep in thought.

Towler returned as usual, bringing with him a smell of stale beer and strong tobacco. Mrs. Howlet for the first time seemed to notice it; however, she made no remark, but calling Miller to her, said in a quiet tone, 'Put on your cap and go to the bank, and wait until I join you there.'

Miller did as he was told.

'Towler,' Mrs. Howlet said, 'I have had to send Miller out, and have also some business to transact myself. Keep you in the shop; I shall return in about an hour.'

Had Towler been a closer observer, and not so full of his own *cleverness*, he would have noticed that his mistress was agitated, and might have remarked that Miller was unusually silent; but his reasoning seldom took him beyond himself, and was confined to a few plain directions:—

'Never forget No. 1. To provide for No. 1 is the grand object in life. All businesses

have perquisites,—some in gifts to keep your eyes open, and some in gifts to keep your eyes shut. "Palm oil" (as he named these gifts) was used in every trade. Contractors knew that; shippers knew that; the lawyer and the council looked out for it. Without "palm oil" how could his great friend Standfast have got together the business he now possesses? Never.' Then he would follow up his reasoning logically thus:—'What chance of "palm oil" have I whilst I am here? None; therefore I must quietly "work the oracle," or how could I provide for No. 1?'

In short, petty pilfering was all right as long as you are not found out; and to be found out you must be a fool, which he did not consider himself. Thus left to his own pleasant meditations, he availed himself of Mrs. Howlet's absence, and made himself fully acquainted with the contents of her desk,—which in her excitement she had left open,—read her letters, and in many

other ways conducted himself as a *clever* shopman should. However, the misfortune was, he read a little too much. He read, among other things, a line scrawled in pencil on a crumpled scrap of paper, 'Look well at the woman now being served;' and this line bothered him exceedingly. 'What does it mean?' he cried. 'It is in Miller's handwriting. Who can it have been addressed to? Not to me—at least I never received it. It must have been intended for Mrs. Howlet. And why should she look well at the woman now being served?' He continued deep in thought for some minutes, then continued: 'I think I know the woman he means. That woman was served by me; that woman was—but no, the poor milksop cannot have discovered anything. However, it is strange, and I don't like it. If he has played me false, I will—' The last word hissed through his teeth, and was lost in delivery.

So, left for an hour of calm reflection, his

thoughts were not pleasant ones. One moment he was haunted by the fear that he might perhaps be detected, but the next moment consoled himself with the belief that no one at the 'Silver Lamb' was a match for him. Was he not a member of the clever 'Sons of Freedom'? and was he not the cleverest among the lot? 'What chance, I should like to know, would poor Miller have against our chairman, or a bright youth like his friend Gablet?' Still the net was gradually being drawn around him; he had felt the pressure of the first mesh.

CHAPTER VI.

EVIL BEGINNINGS HAVE BAD ENDINGS.

A STREET without an outlet is not generally a desirable one to live in, although it may be, and usually is, a lively one. Freed from the fear of passing vehicles, indulgent parents are only too glad to trust their offspring within its boundaries, and bipeds take unchecked possession of that portion more generally allotted to quadrupeds.

Palmer's Row was rich in all the attractions of a 'blind alley.' The houses were narrow but tall, and the front door approached by a long flight of steps, as if the builder, with a view to dividing it between two families, had tried to stick the door in the centre.

The parlour windows were great in vegetation. Anything that could be made to grow was persuaded to try and live there; and in order that the delusion might be more fully carried out, miniature park railings, with white gates, surrounded the bottom of the windows. Birds had also a home in Palmer's Row. Each house appeared not only to vie with its neighbour in the number of cages it could hang upon its face, but also upon the amount of noise that each occupant of the cages could make.

The song of birds, the voices of children, to say nothing of the cries of vendors of fruit, watercress, and milk, made up a most harmonious whole; and as Mrs. Howlet, with young Miller, alighted from her cab at the corner, their welcome appeared more than usually hilarious.

'The house I am going to,' the old lady said, 'is number six, and it appears to me to be the dirtiest in the row. Keep it in

view, Miller, as I may require your services;' and without further directions, she left the errand-boy standing at the corner of the street, and ascended the steps of the sixth house, knocking loudly at the door.

No visit could have been made, as it appeared, at a more inappropriate season. Mrs. Towler (for it was her dwelling) had that morning spoken her mind pretty freely to her good friend, companion, and fellow-lodger, Mrs. Gablet; and Mrs. Gablet had retaliated with a few home-thrusts, that had so discomposed Mrs. Towler's nerves, she had been compelled to have recourse to her usual remedy, a little drop of spirits, and with the usual effect—making her more agitated and snappish than ever.

Mrs. Gablet was thoroughly out of temper also, so that Mrs. Howlet's loud knocking caused her to rush to the front door, with the intention of discharging some of her pent-up indignation upon the unfortunate intruder; but the sight of that lady, with whose face

she was perfectly familiar, calmed her suddenly. Mrs. Gablet's first impulse was to run away; but, endeavouring to conceal herself by standing behind the door, she replied to Mrs. Howlet's inquiry that Mrs. Towler *was* within, and suddenly opening the parlour door in order to take attention from herself, disclosed the good lady in question in the act of once more endeavouring to calm her nerves by the use of her favourite remedy. The knock, the opening of the door, and the introduction were all accomplished so suddenly, the mother of the youthful Towler had no time to do more than gasp out some apologies, in which the word spasm was repeated very frequently.

'I have often promised to see you, Mrs. Towler,' in measured tones Mrs. Howlet commenced, 'but my business so monopolizes my spare time, I have but few moments to myself.'

'It is very kind of you,' Mrs. Towler replied, endeavouring to rise from her seat;

'and sorry I am, that what with spasms and anxiety for my family, *I* have but little leisure to do more than run into the road—'

'I hope your family do not cause you any *unusual* anxiety?' Mrs. Howlet broke in suddenly. 'Your son,—the youth who is with me, I mean,—I trust he is a comfort, and not an anxiety to you?'

'Well, to be candid with you,' returned Mrs. Towler, sitting uneasily in her chair,—for she noticed that Mrs. Howlet's eyes were taking a survey of the room, and particularly intent upon the table, on which lay several unfinished pieces of work,—'I do feel anxious about my son Giles. His whole life seems fixed on pleasing you, but night after night, when he comes home, "Mother," he says, "Mrs. Howlet is set against me—no matter what I do, I can't please her now;" and this does surprise me, for I know how kind a mistress you have been to him—to us all, I might say.'

'Oh! he says I am set against him, does

he? and by whom?' inquired the old lady, elevating her voice, the malignant owl expression gathering over her countenance.

'It's not for me to interper—terper—prate,' —the word was difficult to pronounce, and she stuttered over it; 'I say it is difficult for me to know what he means, but I could guess, if so disposed,' Mrs. Towler replied, feeling less at her ease every moment, and more and more affected by what she had taken to drink.

'Speak out, woman; I can vouch for it, your son has no enemy in my house.'

'Well, ma'am, his name's Miller.'

Mrs. Howlet started to her feet.

'Mrs. Towler, I will not hear a word against any of my assistants, and I only trust your son can prove himself as trustworthy;' then turning toward the table, she took up the piece of work lying upon it. 'Where did you get this shirt flannel?'

'The flannel? why, I can hardly say.'

'Can you not give me some idea from

whom you purchased it?' and Mrs. Howlet fixed her penetrating gaze upon the woman.

'Let me see; I bought it from a friend of mine—a friend as I have known from my childhood; and she, I believe, bought it at the mills in Manchester—at least she told me so.'

'It is a peculiar pattern, and one out of make now. Can you produce this friend? I am much interested in knowing where it was purchased.'

'Perhaps I can, and perhaps I can't,' Mrs. Towler replied sharply, for she was beginning to gain courage, and thought that perhaps a little show of spirit would benefit her. 'But, dear ma'am, has anything gone wrong? You have not had any more parcels taken from your errand-boy, have you? I am sure my son is as watchful as a youth can be; but then, how can he do his duty when he is suspected and driven at?'

'Silence, woman, I will hear no more; your own words betray you. Who ever

suspected your son? I have trusted him—I have trusted the whole family, and this is my reward;' she turned towards the window as she spoke, and beckoned to Miller, who stood watching outside.

The errand-boy had watched to some purpose. He had seen a woman hanging about the doorway; that woman he recognised at a glance as Towler's accomplice.

The door being open, Miller entered the house and the room at his mistress' command; but before she had time to speak to him, he said in a low tone, 'The woman standing in the doorway, call her in. Do you not recognise her?' In a moment Mrs. Howlet recalled the face of the female Towler had that day served.

'Perhaps your friend who purchased the shirt flannel at the mills in Manchester had better join us,' Mrs. Howlet said in a sarcastic tone; but Mrs. Towler was so overpowered by the appearance of Miller and the action of her medicine, she could only

sit in her chair and glare upon the whole party. 'Walk in, Mrs.—I have not the pleasure of knowing your name.'

And as the woman addressed was by no means of a retiring or timid nature, she did walk in, saying rudely, 'Gablet is my name; and now what do you want with me?'

'Gently, Mrs. Gablet, gently,' the old lady replied loftily; 'you will perhaps first of all be kind enough to inform me where you purchased this flannel, for I suppose you are the friend Mrs. Towler has alluded to?'

'You know, dear Mrs. Gablet, you bought it at the mills in Manchester,' Mrs. Towler broke in, her tone suddenly becoming a guttural whine.

Mrs. Howlet paid no attention to the remark, but turning to Miller, said, 'You will be kind enough to tell me whether this flannel is the same as that we have in stock.'

'It is, ma'am.'

'And you have seen this party before?'

she continued, waving her hand towards the lodger.

'Don't call me a party, ma'am, or perhaps I may find those who will take up my cause, widow though I am, to my sorrow.'

'Mrs. Gablet,' Miller replied, paying no attention to the interruption, 'has frequently been to our shop, and the last time she came (this morning, indeed) had a piece of flannel similar to that on the table.'

'You know, dear Mrs. Gablet, you bought it at the mills in Manchester,' Mrs. Towler again broke in.

'Whether I bought it at the mills or at the "Silver Lamb" is of very little consequence; I suppose I paid for it, and I suppose my money is as good as anybody else's. What do you mean, Mrs. Howlet, by coming here, and bringing your young bullies with you? I'm not afraid of you; and although Mrs. Towler seems so chicken-hearted, I can speak my mind, and let you

know what I think of you and your insinuations.'

'Silence, woman! You had better not rouse me.' Then turning to the creature she had so long befriended, and whose ingratitude she now felt most acutely, Mrs. Howlet said: 'And is it thus, Mrs. Towler, you return me evil for good? Is it thus you repay the benefits I have heaped upon you and yours for years? Recall the past; remember your husband lay dead, and you had six children, and were powerless to help them. We took your eldest boy into our firm, and to the "Silver Lamb" he owes all he has in the world. Your youngest boy was then taken charge of; how has he repaid that confidence? Aided by his mother and her criminal companions—I say it, Mrs. Gablet, and all your frowns will not make me recall my words—robs the friend that has guided him, robs the house from which he receives his daily bread. He throws away his good name, throws away his ad-

vancement, and casts himself upon the world a callous, shameless, detected rogue. He falls from the grade of an honest, honoured tradesman, to be a thief. Yes, I say it, Mrs. Towler, a thief; and although he is not yet convicted and branded, he is hurrying on the road that leads to that distinction. It is this you have tried to excuse—this you have aided and fostered, but the punishment will rest on your head when I am dead; it will pass to your children—will draw them down, until, from the depth of their misery, they call a curse instead of a blessing upon the parents who might have taught them a better lesson.'

There was something in the old lady's manner, even more than her words, that seemed to impress them all. They knew how good a friend she had been, but never for a moment imagined their little pilferings would be detected, nor thought that she was capable of administering so severe a rebuke. They saw the tears standing in her angry

eyes, but somehow had not a word to say in excuse. When she had finished speaking, she turned to leave, and would have hurried from the house for ever, in spite of all their interceding (for they were humble enough now, and had found their voices, seeing that she was about to depart), but a youth stood in the doorway, who cried out as he came into the room, 'What is all this row about, mother? shall I turn the old woman out?'

He addressed Mrs. Gablet, and looked round the room with a bold, defiant air, until his eye rested on Miller, who had stood a meek and sorrowful witness of the scene. He was then about to sneak away, but the errand-boy arrested his retreat.

'At last, at last we meet!' Miller cried, seizing the new-comer by the collar; 'oh, you may try to avoid me, you may pretend not to know me, but I know you. This, this, ma'am, is the boy who stole the parcel from me! Down, down on your knees, you rogue—you coward!' he cried, hurling him

to the ground as he spoke; 'acknowledge that you took the parcel—acknowledge that you robbed me, or, by Heaven, I—'

A firm hand on his shoulder arrested his speech. 'We have seen and heard enough; I command you, Miller, let him go. The air of this place seems to suffocate me; lead me out,' and the old lady, leaning on the arm of her errand-boy, drew him towards the door.

They hurried out of the house, out of the street, away from the neighbourhood, without a word being spoken by either. A cab drew up at the roadside; 'I will go home alone,' Mrs. Howlet said. 'Do not speak to me. Come to business as usual to-morrow. God bless you, my boy, God bless you.'

The cab quickly passed away, and the face of the kind mistress, whose eyes were wet with tears, was no longer seen; but the words she had last spoken rested in the boy's heart. 'May I never forget that bless-

ing,' he said to himself, 'and may I ever remember the giver of it.' He stood by the roadside looking wistfully after the cab, and appeared stunned by the suddenness of the late discoveries. That Towler had encompassed his ruin and disgrace he felt convinced, but he had long since given up all hope of ever discovering the taker of the parcel. The events of the day seemed to pass before him like a troubled dream, and he hardly knew how long he stood by the roadside musing. He found himself at home at last, relating to his mother what had taken place; yet it all appeared very like a dream. There was one thing, however, he never forgot in the midst of all his musings,—the blessing; and though it was delivered in a broken voice, a voice no longer young or musical, it had the pleasantest sound he had listened to for many a day, and came back to him, like a happy memory, over and over again.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Howlet dismissed Towler, but how she did it, and what she said to him, Miller never knew. She never mentioned his name, nor the name of any member of the family, again. Her confidence in her errand-boy was now fully established, and he knew that she trusted him, and he valued the trust she reposed in him as something to be proud of.

CHAPTER VII.

TOWLER'S VENGEANCE.

THE 'Hand and Heart' public-house was situated in a locality so begrimed with dirt, and so poor, that at first sight it puzzled the beholder to discover how it managed to exist at all. Although it had been established many years, its proprietor was never known to have had a *hand* in anything that was good, nor had he either the *heart* to dictate a generous action; so the title of the house was evidently a misnomer, unless the fact of its changing hands so frequently, and their all leaving the place disheartened, ironically suggested the name. Be this as it may, the 'Hand and Heart' was a favourite resort of young Towler, and here

he repaired after his late dismissal by Mrs. Howlet. He was, as we have said, a distinguished member of the club called the 'Sons of Freedom,' and was now engaged upon a little conspiracy, which had for its object—so he believed—the total overthrow of 'Howlet's' and the signal disgrace of Master Miller. He did not exactly see how that was to be accomplished; but when he was in luck, and gave liberally to the club, they assured him that it could be done, and he now determined to take them at their word. He had been working at this little scheme ever since his dismissal, and to-night was to witness the realization of his fondest wishes, and a meeting of the 'Sons of Freedom' had been called to ratify his resolutions.

The evening was a close one; and as the ventilation of the 'Hand and Heart' was anything but perfect, and the street in which it was situated narrow, the meeting 'hall' of the 'Sons' had a stuffy, stale smell about it. The landlord was standing in the doorway,

and as the members one by one entered, he seemed to scan them with anything but a favourable expression. At length the great Towler made his appearance; and with him was young Gablet, the interesting youth we have before met, and who was also a 'Son of Freedom.' They both of them smoked short clay pipes, and appeared to excel in the art of expectorating with precision in any given direction. The landlord eyed Towler with special interest, and seemed better satisfied when he had got him into the house; but he only said 'good evening' in a voice—possibly owing to the break in his nose—that seemed to come from the back of his neck.

'This will be a grand evening,' Towler said to his companion, 'and I think we shall be able to show the Howlets that they can't ride rough-shod over us yet.'

'Ah,' Gablet answered; and it may be remarked that in conversation this youth did not trouble himself to take his pipe out of

his mouth, but held it there, which he believed gave him a manly, or as he termed it, a 'gamey,' appearance.

'Gouse is coming, and the two Steppes,' Towler continued; but his companion cut him short by asking—

'Have you any money with you?'

'Certainly; why do you ask?'

'Because you will have to stand all expenses as your resolution is coming on.'

'Oh, I have money enough for that.'

The two worthy members were now joined by several other 'Sons,' all of whom appeared to be of the same stamp, and varied very little in their general appearance, excepting that some were dressed better than others; but they all had the same villanous expression of face, and smoked continuously.

Suddenly a small bell rang in an adjoining room, and the members at once began to arrange themselves around the table, and for a moment took their pipes out of their mouths. The small bell rang

a second time; then one, who appeared to be the senior member present, answered by blowing on a whistle three times. The door was thereupon opened, and a voice cried from without: 'Make room for your chairman.' The 'Sons of Freedom' then stood up, and the chairman (who was the landlord of the house) entered, and having taken his seat on a raised chair at the head of the table, said, 'Gentlemen, be seated; Sons, resume your pleasures.'

In a few moments he stood up again, and each member answered to his name. The chairman then cried, 'Are any strangers present?'

'None,' the members answered.

'All are friends?'

'All,' was the reply.

Again the chairman sat down, and the Sons, taking advantage of the privilege, worked away at their pipes with so much good-will that the room was very shortly filled with smoke.

Once more the landlord was on his legs, and this time commanded silence, the members putting down their pipes in an instant. 'Has any Son a grievance to redress? If so, let him stand up and state it now,' he said. There was a short pause, and the members looked the one to the other. This was Towler's opportunity. He rose from his seat, and, in a voice tremulous from emotion, said, 'Gentlemen, I am pleased at being allowed to address you, for I have a wrong, a great wrong—'

'One moment, if you please, my son,' the chairman said. 'Before you state what that wrong is, you must ensure attention in the usual way.' He then rang a bell which stood at his right hand, and the waiter of the house appeared, to whom Towler addressed some directions, at the same time putting money into his hand. Until the waiter returned, the members talked one with the other, and Towler was left to meditate upon his speech. He was not, however,

kept long in suspense; the attendant soon returned, bringing with him a tray laden with pewter tankards, one of which he placed before each of the members, and a double-sized one in front of the chairman.

'Now, my son, you can state your grievance; and you, gentlemen, can once more resume your pleasures.'

The members 'resumed their pleasures' very lustily, throwing a cloud around each other; but no one attempted to speak a word.

Again the youthful conspirator stood up, but somehow he did not feel quite so much confidence this time. He, however, stated what he wanted of the members. It was that they should all, conjointly and severally, promise to injure, by the circulation of fabricated reports, John Miller, shopman to Mrs. Howlet. That they would set the machinery of the club thoroughly to work, in order to take away his character and destroy his credit. 'I have here a list of

Howlet's customers,' he said, 'and also some of the houses with which Mrs. Howlet does business. Anonymous letters must be written, putting them on their guard against Miller; and I promise to give any member of the club who may desire it such information, that if he likes to work it out, he may benefit himself *in other ways*, and do some good to the Society also.' These words he said in a peculiarly significant manner, readily understood by those present. His speech was a long one, but all to the same purpose; and when he sat down, he was rather surprised it was received with so little favour. He was accustomed to be greeted with tumultuous cheers, and did not like the ominous silence.

At the further end of the Hall, at the back of Towler, there was a small window, through which beer and other refreshments were sometimes taken into the room. While this favoured 'Son of Freedom' was talking, the window was gently opened, and a face ap-

peared there for a moment. It was not an ordinary-looking face, but one of a peculiarly striking character. The features were sharp, and the hair and whiskers cut short, and the eyes dark and ferret-like. The chairman noticed the face—indeed, he had been looking out for it, and a glance passed between them.

Irritated at the way in which his modest proposals were received, Towler waxed wroth, and standing up again, said: 'You know I have been a true and liberal member, and look for some return. You have promised to bind yourselves to the resolution I have read out. Now is your time to prove your boasted power, and I say again I look for it.'

'We are not to be dictated to, Master Towler, but you shall have all the benefits the Society can confer upon your answering the usual inquiry. It is necessary that a member who makes a request should be a free man. We have a mark against your name, which must be first cleared away.'

'What do you mean?' Towler asked, moving in his chair uncomfortably.

'You shall hear,' the chairman replied, in a voice that was distinctly heard throughout the building. 'Some weeks ago, a young man entered a house of business in the city, to inquire whether they wanted an assistant. He was noticed to walk through the shop, and to stand for a moment at a desk at the further end. After he had left, a pocket-book, supposed to have been lying on the desk, was missed, and that pocket-book contained several Bank of England notes.'

'What has that to do with me?' Towler cried out, getting more uneasy every moment.

'You shall hear,' the chairman calmly answered. 'The numbers of the notes were known, and one of them has been changed and traced to you.'

During this speech the face again appeared at the window, and another recognition passed between the chairman and the looker-on.

The observer then left his place and quietly walked into the room.

'I am not going to sit here and be insulted,' Towler said, starting to his feet. 'Who dares to accuse me?'

'I do,' a voice cried; 'you got me to change the note, but I took the precaution of taking down the number.'

Towler turned to where the voice came from, and with a sickly glance saw it was his friend, his bosom friend, Gablet. He knew that all was over with him now, and leaned on the chair he had just vacated for support. He tried to leave the hall, but was stopped—the detective stood by his side.

'I have been deceived—I have been trapped—I have been robbed,' he muttered through his teeth. He remembered now that it was Gablet who had introduced him to the Club. It was Gablet who had poured into his ear the long accounts of the Society's power. Gablet had spent his money, lived on his plunder, and ever professed to be his

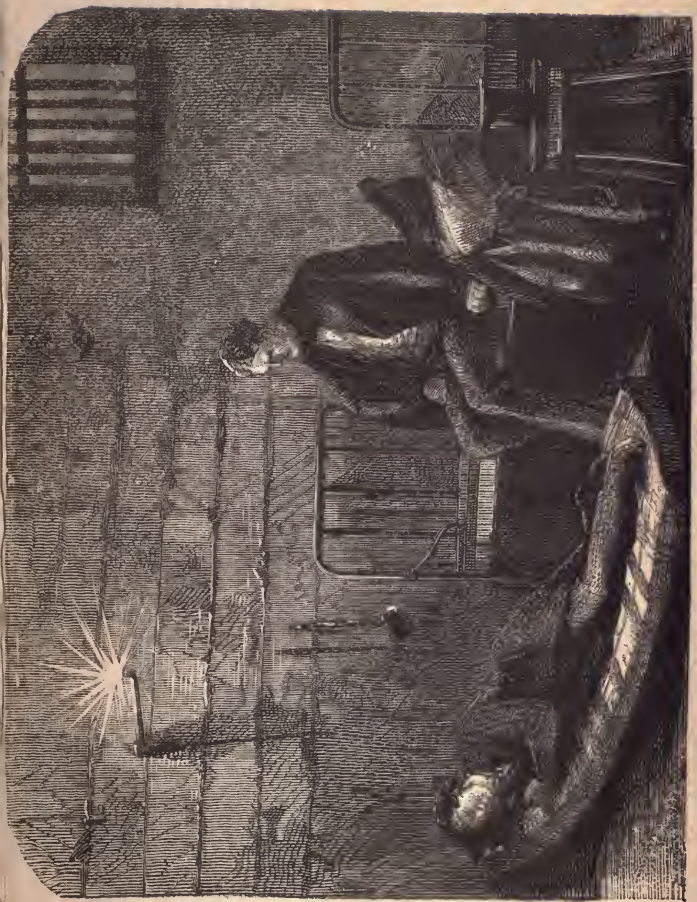
devoted friend. He saw it now; on all sides he had been cheated. He, a clever cheater himself, had been outwitted, had been entrapped, and made a scape-goat for the whole Club.

It was a bitter moment for the misguided young man. He remembered Miller now, and envied him the comfortable place he had got at Howlet's. He remembered that he had taught Gablet to be a thief, that he had instructed him how to steal the parcel from Miller years ago; and now he reaped the reward.

The detective put a pair of handcuffs on his prisoner, and led him away, passing the 'Sons of Freedom' one by one; but none had a kindly word of sympathy to offer. They looked on with perfect indifference, and Towler felt that he had not a friend in the world.

The landlord of the 'Hand and Heart' congratulated himself upon having done a smart thing. His house was in ill repute,

and required 'sweetening.' The sacrifice of Towler (who had now become useless as a customer) just occurred in time to save his reputation. He communicated with the police, stating that 'he was at all times desirous of forwarding the ends of justice, and that the man who had transgressed the laws of his country could never remain a member of the Society of which he was the unworthy chairman.' The police took his communication for what it was worth, but they did not neglect to take their prisoner also. Gablet, as he knew where to put his hand on the pocket-book with the other bank-notes in it, was rewarded. He gave the evidence through which his former friend was convicted with the most perfect equanimity, remarking that Towler was never a favourite of his, and he thought he had done well to get rid of a troublesome companion.



TOWLER IN PRISON.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

WHILE the dishonest shopman was undergoing, in penal servitude, the just punishment for his many transgressions, Miller was raising himself step by step in the estimation of his neighbours, and establishing himself more firmly in the confidence of his kind mistress. The bank manager, also, was as good as his word; he gave Miller a letter, relating in a few sentences the incident of his finding the half-sovereign, and the honesty he had displayed in returning it. He also presented him with five pounds, and made a point of calling upon Mrs. Howlet, telling her that if she was willing to part with her shop-boy, he

would take him into the bank. This the good lady, with much pleasure, related to Miller, but was not displeased to find that he elected to remain with her.

More and more Mrs. Howlet, as years passed on, continued to repose confidence in her former errand-boy, now her shopman and general superintendent; and so peaceably did the days pass, that the good old lady could hardly believe, as one year succeeded another, the rapid advance of time, and that five years had flown since that eventful one when she dismissed Towler. Sitting at her high desk, with the old look, the round spectacles, and the frilled cap, her resemblance to the owl became more marked each day; but Miller could not fail to notice that her hand was getting more tremulous, and the eye becoming dimmed. In vain he tried to persuade her to attend less to the business and more to her own comforts. The active spirit, that for nearly sixty years had made her life a contented

one, could not rest in idleness, and all that her faithful shopman could do was to anticipate her wants and follow out her wishes. Mrs. Miller was also frequently in attendance upon her; and the old lady knew that they both loved her, that they were grateful for the bounties she had heaped upon them, and that they made her home—the only one she would ever acknowledge—a happy one.

But happy days cannot last for ever; and a sad one came, when straw was laid down before the little shop in Bloomsbury, and whispers passed from one neighbour to another, 'Mrs. Howlet is ill—very ill.'

The straw got trodden upon by many feet, and blown about by the wind, but the silence it gave could not ease the sufferer. It remained for many days, but at last was taken up, and the street made clean again. When the street was made clean, the shutters of the 'Silver Lamb' were closed, and the neighbours now whispered one to the other, 'Mrs. Howlet is dead—dead!'

The whole street seemed to look gloomy while the straw was down, and the inside of the shop more so than any other part; but when the straw was taken up the gloom was not dissipated, nor was the 'Silver Lamb' any brighter than before.

'Poor Mrs. Howlet,' was on every lip; and without her the old desk looked in Miller's eyes more desolate than all.

These were the good lady's last words: 'You have been faithful to me, Miller, you have been faithful, and I have not forgotten you;' but her words had long died away before the prostrate figure that kneeled by her bedside knew that she was now silent for ever.

'Good, kind, happy mistress; these are your last words—you have not forgotten me. Oh! may they be mine! I have not forgotten you, I have not forgotten you.'

So the 'Silver Lamb' was painted up anew after the days of mourning were past, and made to look, both inside and out, as

bright as new paint could make it. Miller was proprietor now; but he too was called Howlet, and Howlet's name still remained over the door. Hard work so contributed to success that Miller became a rich man, and on one particular day the neighbours were surprised to find that the shutters of the 'Silver Lamb' had never been taken down. Their curiosity being piqued, they managed to get a look within, when their astonishment was increased upon discovering that friends were assembled; but there was not one gloomy face among them all—no, not one.

The sun *did* shine this day; indeed, it shone so brightly, that not a blind in the house seemed thick enough to keep it out.

A fine, honest-faced young man was standing in the back parlour before a picture. It was the picture of an old lady, with round spectacles and a cap border as stiff as it could be made to look.

'Can you believe, dear,' the young man

said, 'that I was once afraid of that face, and fancied that it looked like an angry owl? I could not see then the smile that lurks about that mouth, and the bright, happy twinkle in the old eye.' The young man stood before the portrait, but not alone. A little, dimple-faced, red-and-white-cheeked girl rested on his arm, one of her hands in his, and her face turned to look not so much at the portrait as at him. 'This is the best wedding present I have got to give you, darling—the likeness of my kind benefactress, my dear mistress. Her last words to me were, "I have not forgotten you." Oh, may the remembrance of those words bring with them a blessing on us both, under this roof to-day, and for ever!'

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